

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil Web: sd.ng.mil



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SD Air National Guard announces Airmen of the Year

By Tech. Sgt. Abbey Rotter
114th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – The South Dakota Air National Guard is pleased to announce its outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2015. Four Airmen from the 114th Fighter Wing were selected as the First Sergeant, Senior Noncommissioned Officer, Noncommissioned Officer, and Airman of the Year.

The recipients were chosen based on their leadership, job performance, personal achievements and adherence to the U.S. Air Force core values: integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do.

Master Sgt. Justin Rey, of Sioux Falls, was selected as the First Sergeant of the Year. Rey is the first sergeant for the 114th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron and Maintenance Group. He originally joined the National Guard for the education benefits, but has stayed for 20 years because of the patriotic duty and the fellow Airmen serving alongside him.

“I am honored to be recognized along with such great Airmen,” said Rey. “I consider this a testament to those that have mentored and coached me along the way.”

In the civilian sector, Rey works as the director of human resources and senior vice president with Heritage Bank.

Rey wants to continue to serve, teach and mentor Airmen within the unit, and said, “Put yourself out there. Do your best every day to perform at a high level and continue to improve.”

Master Sgt. Elizabeth Johnson was selected as the Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. Johnson grew up in Hartford and is a member of the 114th Medical Group. She was intrigued by the SDANG because she wanted the opportunity to give back to her community. As a civilian, she works as a registered nurse at Prairie States Surgical Center.

In the future, Johnson hopes to commission as an officer with the Medical Group.

“I want other Airmen to know that this is their career, and they are responsible for making the most of it,” said Johnson. “Do not wait for opportunities, seek them out.”

Technical Sgt. Jared Bowen, of Fordyce, Neb., was selected as the Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. He works with the 114th Maintenance Squadron as a quality assurance inspector. Bowen has served with the SDANG for 14 years and joined after 9/11 to serve his country after the attacks.

“I am very proud to receive this honor,” Bowen said. “I am grateful for all the support and mentorship that I have received over the years.”

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Bowen works as a quality manager for Manitou Americas in Yankton, and said the experience he has gained from the military has provided him with a strong set of personal values and makes him a valuable asset in the civilian sector.

“Airmen should never stop gaining knowledge,” he said. “They should continue to gain experiences that will make them valuable to the organization.”

In the future, he wants to continue to meet the needs of the maintenance squadron and look for ways to improve the entire organization.

Senior Airmen Amber Spade, of Dell Rapids, was selected as the Airman of the Year. For the past three years, Spade has been a member of the 114th Force Support Squadron. She joined the SDANG after seeing her best friend’s accomplishments within the unit.

“Her accomplishments really made me to push to achieve the same,” said Spade.

Spade said she has many family members who have also joined the military and is excited to follow in their footsteps.

The 2015 Airmen of the Year will represent the 114th Fighter Wing as they compete against other Air National Guard members nationwide to determine the overall Air National Guard Airmen of the Year.

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



Master Sgt. Justin Rey – First Sergeant of the Year
(U.S. Air National Guard file photo)



Master Sgt. Elizabeth Johnson – Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year
(U.S. Air National Guard file photo)



Tech. Sgt. Jared Bowen – Noncommissioned Officer of the Year
(U.S. Air National Guard file photo)



Senior Airman Amber Spade - Airman of the Year
(U.S. Air National Guard file photo)

FOR MORE INFORMATION contact Maj. Anthony Deiss at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil.